

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claims 1-17 (Canceled).

Claim 18 (Currently Amended): A hot-rolled wire rod obtained by hot rolling a steel composition comprising (in mass%):

C: 0.6 to 1.0%,  
Si: 0.1 to 0.85%,  
Mn: 0.3 to 1.0%,  
Cr: 0.3% or less, excluding zero%.  
P: 0.01% or less, and  
S: 0.02% or less;

performing a first cooling of the wire rod at an average cooling rate of 8 to 20°C/sec in a temperature range of from 900 to 670°C; and

performing a second cooling of the wire rod at an average cooling rate of 1 to 5°C/sec in a temperature range of from 670 to 500°C;

wherein

said hot-rolled wire rod is 5.0 mm or more in diameter;  
not less than 90% of said wire rod in area percentage comprises a pearlite structure;  
a loading density (d/L) of said wire rod is controlled to be 0.20 or less when the wire rod is loaded on a loop conveyor during said first and second cooling, wherein d is the diameter of the wire rod and L is the ring pitch; and

the mechanical properties of said wire rod 4 m in length satisfy the following expressions (1) to (4):

(1)  $TS^* - 30 \leq \text{Average value of tensile strength (} TS_{AV} \text{ in MPa)} \leq TS^* + 30$ ,

where,  $TS^* = 400x\{[C]+([Mn]+[Si])/5\}+670$  and the elements in square brackets [ ]

in the equation mean the contents of relevant elements in percentage,

(2) Standard deviation of tensile strength ( $TS\sigma$ )  $\leq 30$  MPa,

(3) Average value of reduction of area ( $RA_{AV}$ )  $> 35\%$ ,

(4) Standard deviation of reduction of area ( $RA\sigma$ )  $\leq 4\%$ .

Claim 19 (New): The hot-rolled wire rod according to claim 18, wherein the loading density d/L is from 0.10 to 0.20.

Claim 20 (New): The hot-rolled wire rod according to claim 18, wherein the average diameter of nodules in said pearlite structure is 10  $\mu\text{m}$  or less.

Claim 21 (New): The hot-rolled wire rod according to claim 18, wherein said wire rod further comprises Ni in an amount of 0.3 mass% or less, excluding zero.

Claim 22 (New): The hot-rolled wire rod according to claim 18, wherein said wire rod further comprises, in a total amount of 0.1 mass% or less, excluding zero, at least one selected from the group consisting of Nb, V, Ti, Hf and Zr.

Claim 23 (New): The hot-rolled wire rod according to claim 18, wherein said wire rod further comprises N in an amount of 0.01 mass% or less, excluding zero.

Claim 24 (New): The hot-rolled wire rod according to claim 18, wherein said wire rod further comprises Al in an amount of 0.05 mass% or less, excluding zero, and Mg in an amount of 0.01 mass% or less, excluding zero.

Claim 25 (New): The hot-rolled wire rod according to claim 18, wherein said wire rod further comprises B in an amount of 0.001 to 0.005 mass%.